



Historical Characters

Key Question: How am I like or different from people who were involved in the U.S.-Mexican War? How did their personalities help or hinder them in the War?

Relevance to Student Knowledge: Students at this age are developing personal values and enjoy comparing their values to others.

Student Learning Objectives: Students will become familiar with key people in the U.S.-Mexican War.

National Standards Grades 5-12
U.S. History Standard 1: Expansion & Reform:

1C: Mexican-American War
Language Arts Standard 3:
Evaluation Strategies
Language Arts Standard 5:
Communication Strategies

MATERIALS

- ◇ Biography Cards
- ◇ Student worksheet **Everyone is a Character**
- ◇ Student worksheet **Who Am I Like?**

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

1. Make photocopies of the biography cards and student worksheets.
2. Write the names from the Biography Cards on the board.

Vocabulary: Most vocabulary words are on the Biography Cards.

- ◇ **Characteristic:** A special quality that makes one person different from other people

LESSON

Introduction

1. Define *characteristic* or have students look up the definition.
2. Hand out the student worksheet **Everyone is a Character**.
3. Allow students to share their answers with the class.

Guided Lesson

1. Tell students they will learn about people who were involved in the U.S.-Mexican War. Their names are listed on the board.
2. **If applicable**, ask students what they know about these people.
3. Hand out the biography cards.
4. Tell students: As you read the Biography Cards, think about how you are the same and how you are different from that person.
5. Pass out the student worksheet **Who am I Like?**
6. Review the worksheet with students.
7. **Optional:** Give an example such as: Sarah Bowman was brave when she refused to stay in a protected area during the siege of Fort Brown. I am brave when I speak up when I hear kids teasing someone else.

LESSON

8. Once students have filled in their worksheet, have them write an essay in which they explain how the person's characteristics would help them in a battle situation.

Wrap- up Activities

1. Ask students: How do you think the qualities of your person would help or hinder them in a battle? List responses.
2. Have a class discussion on the qualities of a good soldier.

Extension Activities

1. Create an Army recruitment poster that lists the qualities a soldier needs.
2. Have students choose a person they admire and write a short essay about how they wish they had the qualities of that person.

OPTIONS

- ◇ Put students in working groups.
- ◇ Complete the activity as a class.

STUDENT ASSESSMENT

- ◇ Observe each student for class participation.
- ◇ Evaluate student essays.

GENERAL MARIANO ARISTA (1802-1855)



A loyal leader of Mexico's Northern Army, General Mariano Arista refused to support General Paredes' government takeover. After becoming President, Paredes replaced Arista and chose Pedro Ampudia to be the new General of the Northern Army.

Northern citizens didn't trust Ampudia and demanded Arista's return. Paredes soon returned Arista to power. The next day, the determined general sent troops across the border, resulting in a Mexican victory in a **skirmish** at Rancho de Carricitos.

Success was short-lived. As Mexican forces lost at Resaca de la Palma and abandoned Matamoros, Ampudia was restored to power.

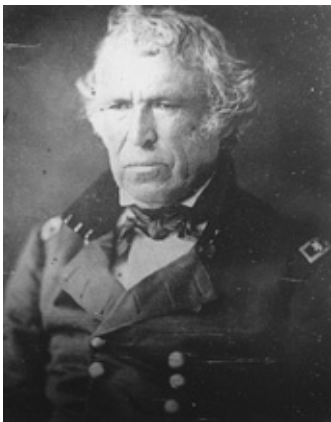
Arista refused to give up and demanded a military **tribunal** review his **strategies**. They did and declared "Perdío peleando" (he went down fighting). Arista's **ambition** led him to be Secretary of War and, in 1851, to become President of the Mexican Republic.

◇ Skirmish: A minor fight between small bodies of troops ◇ Tribunal: Court of justice

◇ Strategy: Plan of attack

◇ Ambition: An eager desire for social standing, fame, power, or to achieve a particular goal

GENERAL ZACHARY TAYLOR (1784-1850)



The modest General Zachary Taylor preferred to wear a plain uniform and straw hat than a General's polished uniform. Having been in the army for over 40 years, Taylor understood the hardships of a soldier's life. Unlike other generals, he fought alongside his men, earning their trust and respect. He was known as "Old Rough and Ready," a nickname that reflected his modesty and ability to make quick decisions in battle.

His success in the Battles of Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma made the General a national hero. However, after slow progress and arguments over supplies and **tactics**, President Polk replaced Taylor with General Scott.

To the public, Taylor was still a patriotic hero and was offered a Presidential **nomination**. Taylor declared he was ready to serve his country if elected. In 1849, this modest and respected General became the 12th U.S. President.

◇ Tactics: The science and art of arranging and moving soldiers in battle

◇ Nomination: The process of choosing as a candidate for election

GENERAL ANATASCIO TORREJÓN (1802-Unknown)



General Torrejón was not afraid to fight. When General Arista needed troops to cross the Rio Grande, he chose the daring Torrejón for the job. On April 25, 1846, Torrejón's **lancers** attacked Captain Thornton's scout party in a **skirmish** at Rancho de Carricitos. Eleven U.S. soldiers died. On May 11, when President Polk heard of the skirmish, he declared war against Mexico.

War had already begun. On May 8, Torrejón's bravery shone through in the Battle of Palo Alto. When Arista ordered Torrejón to attack the U.S. battleline, this fighter led his men against fierce enemy fire. Many lancers were killed in the attack.

Later when Torrejón led troops in the Battle of Contreras, he was accused of being a coward. An official report accused him of retreating so fast that the lancer's horses trampled the Mexican infantry. Regardless, today Torrejón is remembered as the courageous fighter who first attacked U.S. troops.

◇ Lancer: Soldier who rode on horseback and carried a long sword called a lance

◇ Skirmish: A minor fight between small bodies of troops

GENERAL PEDRO DE AMPUDIA (1805-1868)



General Pedro de Ampudia was a cruel, **ruthless** leader used to getting his way. After a disagreement with a Mexican governor, Ampudia had the man beheaded.

Ampudia was selected to be the General of the Northern Army and was sent to the City of Matamoros, across the Rio Grande from the U.S. fort. Upon arriving, Ampudia threatened the U.S. General Taylor to leave within 24 hours or "arms and arms alone" would be his only option. Taylor stayed.

Citizens of Matamoros feared Ampudia. He cheated them and treated them like servants. They were glad when the former General Mariano Arista, whom they knew and respected, replaced Ampudia.

Furious and jealous, Ampudia undermined Arista, criticizing his battle **tactics**. After Mexican soldiers retreated after the Battles of Palo Alto and Resaca de la Palma, Ampudia regained power and once again became the General.

◇ Ruthless: Having no pity or mercy

◇ Tactics: The science and art of arranging and moving soldiers in battle

MAJOR JACOB BROWN (1788-1846)



When General Taylor needed a trustworthy soldier to command Fort Texas, he chose the devoted Major Jacob Brown. Brown inspired confidence in his soldiers, who respected him for his modesty and coolness under fire.

General Taylor left the fort under Brown's command and went to gather supplies. Two days later, the Mexican Army **bombarded** the fort with cannonballs. While giving orders, Brown was struck in the leg by a cannonball, leaving only torn muscles and crushed bones. As he was carried to the hospital tent, he calmly ordered his men to fight saying, "I am but one among you." Before his death on May 9, 1846, the **humble** Major exclaimed he was grateful that he was hit, rather than a younger soldier.

Upon his return, Taylor renamed the fort Fort Brown in his honor. Today the city of Brownsville, Texas is named after the brave Major Jacob Brown.

◇ Bombard: To attack forcefully or continuously, especially with cannonballs

◇ Humble: Modest or meek in manner; Not proud or bold

MAJOR SAMUEL RINGGOLD (1800-1846)



Looking to improve their **artillery**, the U.S. Army sent the intelligent and creative Major Ringgold to France and England to study their technology. Upon his return, this inventor redesigned both cannon and methods for firing cannon. His creation was called "Flying Artillery" as the extremely lightweight cannon could be quickly moved around the battlefield.

Ringgold, determined his invention would work, **drilled** his **cannoneers**. The practice paid off. During the Battle of Palo Alto, Ringgold's Flying Artillery flew across the battlefield and successfully defended many Mexican attacks.

However, Ringgold was hit in the leg by a Mexican cannonball. Lying on the ground, he told an officer "Don't stay with me. You have work to do." Upon hearing word of his death, people across the country mourned for the "Father of Modern Artillery".

◇ Artillery: Cannon

◇ Drill: To train by repetition

◇ Cannoneers: Soldiers who fired cannons; Cannoneers worked as a team

GENERAL RÓMULO DÍAZ DE LA VEGA (~1804-1877)



The Battle of Resaca de la Palma was fierce and many Mexican soldiers fled. The brave General Díaz de la Vega stood his ground, even when attacked by Captain May's **dragoons**.

Taken prisoner, de la Vega was offered freedom if he promised to never again fight against the U.S. The patriot refused on grounds of **honor**, saying he had **vowed** to fight for Mexico – a promise he would not break.

Impressed by his **integrity**, Taylor requested that de la Vega be treated as a guest rather than a prisoner. Upon arriving in New Orleans, he was treated as a celebrity, attending parties and celebrations throughout the city.

When officially released from parole, Vega kept his **oath** to fight for Mexico and was eventually re-captured by U.S. troops. This time, Vega's celebrity status had faded and he remained a prisoner until the end of the War.

◇ Dragoon: A soldier who fought on horseback and on foot

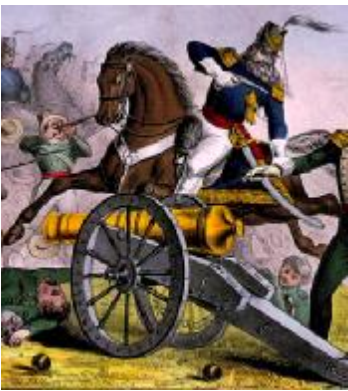
◇ Honor: High moral standards of behavior

◇ Vow: A solemn promise or statement

◇ Integrity: Total honesty and sincerity

◇ Oath: A sincere promise made before a witness

CAPTAIN CHARLES MAY (1819-1864)



Impressed by his horseback-riding skills, President Jackson asked the tall, handsome man to join the U.S. **dragoons**. By the U.S.-Mexican War, Captain Charles May was known as a **daring** – and sometimes **reckless** - leader.

During the Battle of Resaca de la Palma, Taylor ordered May to attack the Mexican **artillery**. May galloped directly into enemy fire, cheering and shouting through a storm of bullets and cannonballs. Riding at lightning speed, he went well past his target. He turned back and captured the Mexican General Díaz de la Vega.

The capture made May a celebrity. Drawings and songs of the Captain's famous capture circulated through the public, who couldn't get enough of the handsome hero.

◇ Dragoons: A soldier who fought on horseback and on foot

◇ Daring: Ready to take risks

◇ Reckless: Showing lack of caution

◇ Artillery: Cannon

SARAH BOWMAN (~1812-1866)



During the U.S.-Mexican War, wives of enlisted men were allowed to travel with their husbands as laundresses or cooks. Sarah Bowman traveled with the U.S. General Taylor's Army to the banks of the Rio Grande. When Mexican cannons began firing on Fort Brown, women were ordered to stay in an underground **magazine** for protection. Sarah refused. Even though a bullet went right through her **sunbonnet**, she continued to cook and serve "her boys" as they defended the **besieged** fort. Her courage and **perseverance** during the six-day siege earned her the nickname "the Heroine of Fort Brown." General Taylor brevetted her – made her a temporary officer – as Colonel Bowman. When she died, this fearless fighter was buried with full military honors.

- ◇ Magazine: A place for keeping explosives in a fort
 - ◇ Sunbonnet: A woman's hat with a wide brim to protect the neck from the sun
 - ◇ Besiege: To surround with armed forces for the purpose of capturing
 - ◇ Persevere: To keep at something in spite of difficulties or discouragement
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Everyone is a Character!



Name: _____

Everyone has unique characteristics—qualities—that are different from others.
Circle the words that describe you.

Energetic

Lazy

Talkative

Fun

Mean

Patient

Forgetful

Boastful

Fussy

Calm

Funny

Caring

Serious

Careful

Imaginative

Cooperative

Weak

Kind

Loyal

Tough

Trustworthy

Brave

Scared

Angry



Who Am I Like?



Name: _____

THIS PERSON	WHEN	I	WHEN I
<u>General Arista</u> REFUSED TO GIVE UP	He demanded that his fighting strategies be reviewed.	REFUSE TO GIVE UP	Keep working on something until it is done.
_____ WAS BRAVE		AM BRAVE	
_____ WAS TRUSTWORTHY		AM TRUSTWORTHY	
_____ WAS A HARD WORKER		AM A HARD WORKER	
_____ WAS LOYAL		AM LOYAL	
Create your own!			